

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY ARA/PAN: RBHOWARD/SMBELL:ZC/GFH

APPROVED BY ARA LA/PAN - S. MOREY BELL

ARA/MEX: RFKING(PHONE)

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 195003

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MX

SUBJECT: PANAMA CANAL ISSUE AT ANNUAL UPI EDITORS
AND PUBLISHERS CONFERENCE

1. PANAMA CANAL ISSUE IS SCHEDULED TO BE DISCUSSED ON OCTOBER 8 AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF UPI EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS IN MEXICO CITY. AS PART OF PANEL PROGRAM, PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR AND TREATY NEGOTIATOR CARLOS ALFREDO LOPEZ GUEVARA HAS BEEN INVITED TO SPEAK ON PANAMA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD CANAL ISSUE. CONGRESSMAN ROBERT L. LEGGETT (D, CAL.) WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF PANAMA CANAL SUBCOMMITTEE OF HOUSE MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES COMMITTEE, HAS BEEN ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN PANEL AND PRESENT HIS VIEWS REGARDING U.S. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE CANAL ISSUE BUT STRICTLY IN A PRIVATE, NON-OFFICIAL, CAPACITY.

2. HAVING READ ADVANCE TEXT OF LOPEZ GUEVARA'S SPEECH, WHICH CONTAINS ABOUT AS MUCH "RESPONSIBLE STATESMANSHIP" CONFIDENTIAL

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AS A PANAMANIAN OFFICIAL COULD BE EXPECTED TO SUMMON,

WE PASSED SUMMARY IN ENGLISH TO LEGGETT ALONG WITH COMPLETE SPANISH TEXT. LEGGETT RECIPROCATED BY GIVING US COPY OF HIS ADDRESS, WHICH WE FIND GENERALLY COMPATIBLE WITH OUR INTERESTS. ARA/PAN COUNTRY

DIRECTOR REMINDED THE CONGRESSMAN, HOWEVER, THAT HIS SPEECH AND, PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, HIS REPLIES TO QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR WILL LIKELY RECEIVE WORLDWIDE PRESS COVERAGE, SOME OF IT DISTORTED, AND COUNSELED CAUTION, PARTICULARLY SINCE CONGRESSMAN WOULD NOT WISH TO PROVOKE CONTROVERSY AT MOMENT WHEN NEGOTIATIONS ARE ABOUT TO BE RESUMED. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT POINT.

3. IN RESPONSE TO QUERY CONGRESSMAN SAID HE ANTICIPATED NO NEED FOR EMBASSY ASSISTANCE, BUT WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF EMBASSY KNEW OF HIS PRESENCE AND COULD BE PREPARED TO ASSIST ON CALL.

4. PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF PANAMA CANAL PROBLEM AT UPI CONFERENCE WILL OCCUR AT DELICATE STAGE IN OUR ON-GOING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WITH PANAMA. THEREFORE, DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY'S COOPERATION IN REPORTING ANY PUBLICITY GIVEN CANAL ISSUE DURING CONFERENCE AND ANY SIGNIFICANT MEXICAN AND/OR LATIN PRESS REACTION TO PANEL PRESENTATIONS BY LOPEZ GUEVARA AND LEGGETT.

5. COUNTRY DIRECTOR MADE TO AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA SAME CAUTIONARY POINTS AS WERE MADE TO LEGGETT. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THE GOP INTENDS ITS PRESENTATION AT MEXICO CITY TO BE "NON-PROVOCATIVE", ELSE IT WOULD HAVE SENT JORGE ILLUECA. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD TELEPHONE LOPEZ GUEVARA TO BE "ESPECIALLY CAREFUL."

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